THE TRANSIT OF VENUS.

THE EXPEDITION AT THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE.

AT ANCHOR IN TABLE BAY—SIMON'S BAY AND CAPE TOWN—POINTS OF INTEREST—SCIENTIFIC REMINISCENCES—LOCAL TRAVEL—THE CLIMATE—OSTRICH FARMING—SOCIAL ENTERTAINMENTS.

From Our Own Correspondent.

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, Monday, Aug. 17. 1874.

We left Bahia on July 14, and arrived at Cape Town on Aug. 5. The view as we lay at anchor in Table Bay was very beautiful. To the north-west stretched the wide expanse of the Atlantic. Looking southward, on the extreme right, was the peak of the Lion's Rump, 1,150 feet high, with the signal station on its summit. On the left was the Devil's Peak, 3,270 feet high; while between these two mountains, and further back than either of them, rose the flattened top of Table Mountain, towering above its neighbors and attaining an altitude of no less than 3,550 feet. These three mountains inclose a triangular space which slopes down to the sea, forming a kind of amphitheatre in which nestles the City of Cape Town. The white, or nearly white, buildings, embowered in the foliage of the valley, and guarded by the stern old mountains whose gray battlements have weathered the storms of countless ages, form a picture on which the eye of the weary voyager rests with peculiar pleasure.

However, we did not lie at anchor long. It would not have been safe to do so at this season of the year, because a north-wester might arrive at any moment, and a ship caught in a severe gale of that kind is almost certain to be wrecked. The bay would afford her no protection whatever. On that account it was formerly the custom for vessels visiting the Cape during the Winter months to go to Simon's Bay, where there is an anchorage secure in all weathers. Simon's Town is to the east, and Cape Town to the west, of the Cape of Good Hope; and although the distance between the two places is fifty-seven miles by sea, it is only twenty miles by land. Still, twenty miles of land transportation—only half the distance being by rail and the rest by wagons or ox-carts—added greatly to the cost of merchandise, and Simon's Town was thriving at the expense of Cape Town. To obviate this the Government built large and commodious docks at the latter place, in which ships of all sizes may lie in perfect safety during the most furious gales. The labor expended on these docks has been immense, but the colonists have a way of getting such work done comparatively cheaply. They form their convicts into chain-gangs and make them do it. Each gang consists of about a dozen men, accompanied by two armed policemen, whose business it is to compel them to work and to prevent them from escaping. The latter object is further secured by their peculiar uniform, covered with stenciled characters, which doubtless convey an immense amount of information to the initiated, but to me are perfectly unintelligible.

Since the docks at Cape Town have been opened for the use of shipping, Simon's Town has ceased to be of any commercial importance. It is still retained as a naval station by the English Government, which has there a dock-yard, with foundries and machine-shops attached, but it is never visited by the mail steamers, and seldom by merchant ships. All these vessels find it more convenient to resort to the docks at Cape Town, and, following their example, the Swatara also went in as soon as the tide served.

CAPE TOWN—ITS POINTS OF INTEREST.

The City of Cape Town has about 30,000 inhabitants, and is the *entrepot* for nearly all the trade of South Africa. It is regularly laid out, with wide, commodious streets running at right angles to each other, and, as the ground slopes toward the sea, there is no lack of good drainage. The houses are usually two stories high, built of brick covered with stucco, and either colored white, light yellow, or light gray. As stucco will last for years when not subjected to to the action of frost, it is much used in the architecture of all tropical and subtropical countries. In these lands it takes the place of stone, and, as it can be readily and cheaply molded into any required form, buildings finished with it are far more profusely ornamented than is common in Northern cities.

Adderley street, which is the principal business thoroughfare of Cape Town, starts from the bay at Central Wharf and extends in a south-westerly direction about a mile. The first two or three blocks from the wharf are occupied by wholesale houses, and then there is a quarter of a mile of retail stores, with large plate-glass show-windows, and stocks of goods which would compare favorably with those to be found in any city of the same size in the United States. After passing them the street suddenly changes its character, and for the remaining half mile of its length becomes an ornamental avenue, bordered with magnificent trees, having the grounds of the Governor's house on one side and the Botanical Garden on the other. I spent many pleasant hours in that garden, wandering among the strange and beautiful plants with which it is filled. It was the dead of Winter, but, excepting the bare branches of a few Northern trees which could not give up the habit of shedding their leaves at that season of the year, everything wore the aspect of early Summer. Magnolias, japonicas, and roses were in full bloom, and the feathery foliage of numerous palms added greatly to the charms of the place. Of artificial ornamentation there was little—none, in fact, save a quaint old sun-dial at the intersection of the main avenues, and a marble statue of Sir George Grey, who was Governor of the colony from 1854 to 1861.

Just outside the north-eastern end of the garden is situated a large and imposing building containing the South African Museum and the Public Library. The museum is almost entirely devoted to natural history, specimens of quadrupeds and birds predominating. The number of objects exhibited is very considerable, but it would require an expert to give a trustworthy opinion of their scientific value. The cases which interested me most were those illustrating the diamond fields. They contained samples of the earth, gravel, and rocks from which the diamonds are dug, and also some small specimens of the rough diamonds themselves. Finally, in order to exhibit the value of the mines, there were models of perhaps twenty of the largest stones hitherto obtained, showing them both before and after cutting. Some of the crystals were immense, and their price would have been fabulous had they been of the first water. Unfortunately they were a little off color, but for all that princes would be proud to wear them, and they sufficed to make the fortunes of the lucky finders.

The library is open to the public, and contains a large collection of books, which seem to be much used. To the stranger, however, its most attractive feature is the long table upon which lie the latest numbers of all the standard English periodicals, and some American ones. They embrace every class of literature, including reviews and scientific journals, and can be consulted without any formality whatever. Except at the Cooper Institute, in New-York, I doubt if such a collection, open to the use of the public, can be found anywhere in the United States. Nevertheless, such collections are not uncommon in the garrison towns of the English colonies, and I was by no means surprised to find this one at the Cape.

We arrived in the city during the height of a political campaign, and the placards posted in every available spot bore witness that such contests are waged here quite as zealously as in any other part of the world. The office to be filled was a seat in the colonial Parliament, and the two principal candidates were Messrs. Cloete and Bam. The following is a specimen of the way they fought each other: Cloete's friends had some placards printed bearing in large letters the words "Vote for Daniel Cloete." As soon as these were posted Bam's supporters procured some slips of paper bearing the words "J. A. Bam," which they pasted over the Cloete placards in such a manner as to make them read "Vote for J. A. Bam." To this Cloete's backers replied by having the letter "u" printed upon some small slips of paper, which they pasted over the letter "a" in Bam's name, thus making the placards read, "Vote for J. A. Bum." This was the *status quo* on Aug. 10, election day, and then the people took the affair into their own hands, and returned Cloete by a rousing majority.

CARRIAGES, HORSE CARS, AND RAILROAD TRAVEL—THE CLIMATE.

The facilities for getting about in Cape Town and its neighborhood are certainly very great. Hansom cabs, precisely like those used in London, are abundant, and the fares very reasonable—for short distances, a shilling; and for longer ones, half-a-crown an hour. Like their brethren the world over, the drivers may occasionally attempt to overcharge strangers, but their peculations are small, and they are always civil. When out riding, an American cannot fail to notice that carriages passing each other always turn to the left instead of to the right. Besides the cabs there is a tramway, or, as it would be called in the United States, a horse railroad, running to the westward around the Lion Mountain, as far as Sea Point; but the cars go only about once an hour, and there are none later than 5:30 P. M. If, upon arriving at the terminus, the excursionist continues along what is known as the Cloof Road, and returns to Cape Town through the gorge which separates the Lion's Head from Table Mountain, he will have an opportunity of enjoying some remarkably fine scenery.

As may be inferred from what has been said above, the Winters here are so mild that ice and snow are almost unknown, and the Summers are nothing like so oppressively warm as in New-York. The only drawback to the climate is the furious south-west wind, which fills the air with dust much of the time during the hot months, a nuisance which is aggravated by the circumstance that the streets are macadamized instead of being paved. Of course the dust is worse in town than in the country, and perhaps that is one of the reasons why it is so much the custom to leave the city as soon as business hours are over. At all events the plain, as far as Wynberg, is studded with pleasant villages, and the travel between them and the town is so great that the Wynberg Railway runs no less than eight trains daily in each direction. The distance to Wynberg itself is only eight miles, and the running time about thirty minutes, so that residences in any of these villages are sufficiently accessible.

Before leaving the subject of railways I must not forget to mention the Cape Town and Wellington Road, which runs up the country in the direction of the diamond mines. At present it extends only fifty-eight miles, but it is being rapidly pushed forward, and in a few months it is expected that not less than four hundred miles of track will be down. While speaking of the interior it may be well to remark that the climate there is quite different from that at the Cape—the Summers are hotter and the Winters so much colder that ice is occasionally formed as much as an inch in thickness.

In the Spring, and to a certain extent even in the Winter, the meadows and fields in the neighborhood of Cape Town are decked with a profusion of the most beautiful wild flowers, many of which are familiar to us in the United States as hot-house plants. For example, the magnificent calla lily grows by the side of every ditch and stream, and is so common that it is usually called "the pig lily." On the hills many varieties of geranium bud and blossom and waste their sweetness on the desert air, while in city door-yards and suburban gardens the stately camellia japonica attains a height of ten or fifteen feet, and hides its foliage with thousands of its own faultless flowers.

SCIENTIFIC REMINISCENCES.

Connected with Cape Town there are some scientific reminiscences of sufficient interest to be worth recalling. More than a century ago the Abbe Lacaille, a distinguished French astronomer, obtained permission from the Dutch Government to visit its colony at the Cape, in order to measure an arc of the meridian. This arc was one of a series measured in different parts of the world about that time for the purpose of determining the true size and figure of the earth, and the operations connected with it detained the Abbe at the Cape nearly three years. During that period he managed to devote some months to observing the southern heavens; and although his only instrument was a small quadrant furnished with a telescope scarcely so powerful as a good modern pocket spy-glass, yet the result of his labors is a catalogue of several thousand stars which is now most highly prized by all astronomers. The house at which he observed is still standing, although it has been greatly altered. It is on the north corner of Adderley and Strand streets, and is occupied by the mercantile firm of Servass & Van Der Byl. In November, 1833, Sir John Herschel sailed from England for the Cape of Good Hope, taking with him an excellent Newtonian reflecting telescope of eighteen and a half inches aperture and twenty feet focus. He arrived at the Cape early in the year 1834, and having purchased the Feldhausen estate, near Wynberg, he set up his telescope there and commenced his famous series of observations on the southern heavens. The results of his labors may be classified under three principal heads: First, he extended to the southern heavens his father's system of gauging, making, and recording upward of 2,000 star-gaugings; secondly, he made a catalogue of 1,700 southern nebulæ; thirdly, he catalogued more than 2,000 southern double stars. In addition to all this, he did much miscellaneous work, among which was the first experimental determination ever made of the quantity of heat received by the earth from the sun. His stay at the Cape lasted four and a quarter years, and before leaving he erected a monument on the spot where his telescope stood. I visited it, and found it in an excellent state of preservation, only a little grayed by the lapse of time; but I fancy all else in its neighborhood is much changed. Instead of being in the midst of an open space, as Sir John left it, it is now surrounded by an orchard. The estate, now within the limits of the village of Claremont, is owned by Mr. Watson, and is no longer called Feldhausen, but is known as "The Grove," taking its appellation from the long avenue of magnificent trees through which the house is approached. In short, the monument is almost the only remaining trace of the illustrious man whose nightly vigils on this spot have rendered it memorable in the history of astronomy.

THE ROYAL OBSERVATORY.

The most important scientific establishment now existing at the Cape is, without doubt, the Royal Observatory. It stands to the eastward of the town, and may be reached either by rail or by private conveyance. If the former mode is chosen, the visitor will purchase a ticket to "Observatory Road" station, from whence a walk of half a mile will bring him to the Observatory itself; if the latter mode, he will drive three miles along the main road toward Simon's Town, and then two-thirds of a mile down a country road which turns sharply to the left, and, after passing the railway station, leads down into a little hollow where it crosses the Liesbeek River—a fine, rapid stream about ten feet wide—and immediately beyond enters the Observatory grounds themselves. The Observatory buildings were erected at a cost of thirty thousand pounds sterling, under the supervision of the first director, Rev. Mr. Fallows, and were completed in the year 1829. They consist of a central edifice and two wings; the former containing the observing and computing rooms, the latter the residences of the Director and his first assistant. They stand upon the summit of a low hill, and are protected from the south-west gales, which prevail in Summer, by a perfect thicket of trees. The grounds occupy several acres, but are mostly unimproved. Besides the trees already mentioned, the side of the hill is clothed with a few bushes, and much gorse; while further down, the land becomes meadow-like, and the pig lily blooms luxuriantly among the grass.

It is the intention of the British Government that the observations made here shall be in all respects similar to, and comparable with, those made at Greenwich, in England; and to attain this object these two observatories have always been furnished with meridian instruments of the same size and pattern. So long as the transit instrument and mural circle were used at Greenwich they were used here also, but when the great transit circle was erected there in the year 1851, a duplicate of it was at once ordered for the Cape, and was mounted here in the year 1856. It is an instrument of the same class as that used at the Washington Observatory, but is slightly smaller, and somewhat differently constructed.

The telescope of the Cape Observatory is a fine achromatic of seven inches aperture. It is equatorially mounted in the best and most substantial manner, but owing to its small size it can scarcely be regarded as of the first class, and it is very desirable that a larger one be sent here soon.

OSTRICH FARMING.

Up the country the raising of ostriches for their feathers has become quite an important industry, but it is only recently that it has been attempted at the Cape itself. I saw a flock of twenty of them pasturing in a meadow near the observatory, and was surprised to learn that they were valued at three hundred and fifty dollars each. They feed on grass, like cattle, and require very little care. Usually they are tolerably docile, but at certain seasons they become irritable, and will sometimes go so far as even to attack any person who happens to approach their vicinity. In such cases they do not make use of their beaks, but kick forward at their antagonist, and as their legs are very powerful, and the middle toe terminates in a sharp and massive claw, if the blow strikes home it is sure to inflict a severe, and not unfrequently a fatal, wound. When enraged they are not easily beaten off, and one of them is a dangerous adversary for an unarmed man. Singularly enough, notwithstanding their long legs, a fallen log, or a fence a foot high, is to them an impassable barrier—they will never try to step over it. Each bird yields from $150 to $250 worth of feathers per annum; those from the females being gray, and those from the males all black, except a single white plume which grows under each wing, and which is the most valuable of all. As in addition to the feathers a number of young birds are reared each year, and as the cost of keeping the flock is small, it will readily be seen that successful ostrich farming is a very lucrative occupation.

SOCIAL MATTERS.

We met here the party sent out by the English Government to observe the transit of Venus at Kerguelen Island. It is under the leadership of Rev. Stephen Perry, S. J., and arrived in the mail steamer nearly a month ago, expecting to proceed at once to Kerguelen in her Majesty's ship Encounter. Unfortunately that vessel was disabled by an accident to her screw, and it became necessary to send to England for another to take her place. It is understood that her Majesty's ship Volage is now on her way out for that purpose, and in the meantime the party are anxiously awaiting her arrival. The detention has doubtless been a source of vexation to them, but to us it has given an opportunity of making the acquaintance of a very agreeable set of gentlemen, who fraternized most cordially with our own Kerguelen party.

During our stay at the Cape, we met many of the prominent officials and citizens, from whom we experienced much kindness and hospitality. In fact, we received more invitations out than we were able to accept. It would scarcely be in good taste to give details respecting private entertainments; but there were two of an official character which may be briefly noticed. The first was a dinner given on the evening of Aug. 12, by Mr. Willard W. Edgecomb, United States Consul, to Capt. Chandler and the chiefs of the scientific parties. Although an official affair, it was intended to be rather private, and, in addition to the gentlemen above mentioned, only a few of the Consul's personal friends were present. Consequently, there was an entire absence of that excessive formality which frequently characterizes such occasions, and everybody found the evening thoroughly enjoyable.

The second official entertainment was a dinner given to Capt. Chandler and the chiefs of the scientific parties on the evening of Aug. 13, by Sir Henry Barkly, Governor of the colony, at which these gentlemen met the members of the English Transit of Venus Expedition to Kerguelen, together with some of the principal civil and military officials of the colony. Here the cuisine and wines were such as to delight the palate of the most exacting epicure, and the service was faultless. After the dessert had been brought on, the Governor rose and made a neat little speech, in which he expressed his satisfaction at the cordial relations now existing between England and America, and hoped that they might never be disturbed by any rivalries more bitter than the peaceful ones of science. He closed by proposing the health of the President of the United States, which he requested might be drank "with the usual honors." This was accordingly done, and the Americans, who had been a little puzzled as to what the usual honors might be, discovered that they were three rousing cheers. In return, Capt. Chandler made a few suitable remarks, and proposed the health of the Queen of England, which was also drank with the usual honors.

At the dinner, only gentlemen were present, but it was followed by a reception, at which the spacious rooms of the Government House were filled with the fairest of the colony. As both Sir Henry and Lady Barkly are in mourning, there was no dancing, but its place was supplied by charming conversation, varied with vocal and instrumental music by some of the accomplished amateurs who were among the guests. All were sorry when the hour for breaking up arrived, and the Americans, at least, will long cherish pleasant memories of the Governor of the Cape of Good Hope and his lovely wife.

W.